

In 2002, the Sydney Morning Herald carried the story

“Church not liable for Lord’s early fallers”¹.

The Lord may move in mysterious ways, but the ways of the District Court proved more fathomable yesterday. Justice James Black ruled that a church could not be held responsible for the safety of a parishioner suddenly struck by the spirit of the Lord.

Lorraine Daly, 40, of Como West, was seeking up to \$750,000 in damages from an Assembly of God church, the Sydney Christian Life Centre.

She claimed the church had been negligent by not providing someone to catch her when she was "slain in the spirit" during a service at Waterloo....

Justice Black raised the prospect that anyone, anywhere, at any time, might suddenly be filled with the spirit of the Lord, fall and injure themselves. And there was no guarantee someone would be on hand to catch them.

There was no evidence "that it was normal for people to fall before they were individually prayed for" and he ruled the defendants were not negligent.

It seems crazy, doesn't it – taking something like this to a civil court.... And I'm actually quite surprised at some of the astute comments, made by the Judge.

And at first glance, it might seem like this is exactly the sort of thing, that today's reading is about – Christians taking other

Christians to court. Why would you do that??? And maybe we could add this one to our list of things that we're "Not to do" – " Don't take other Christians to court" – Check!!!...

I don't think Paul worried, so much, that the Corinthians wouldn't get justice in a civil court – they've just got no business being there...

Last week, as we studied Chapter 5, we talked about how earlier in this same letter, Paul was telling us "Don't judge"; "Don't judge"; "Don't judge", but there in Chapter 5, he was telling the church to "judge". And we talked about "Why the difference."

- As individuals, we are **not** to judge others. We can be discerning (so that we don't get led astray), but we don't pronounce judgment.
- And also, when it's 'a disputable' matter, because the Scriptures aren't fully clear on a particular issue, we cannot judge the person who comes to a different position to what we do, because it's "a disputable matter".

But the Corinthian church (as a united body) were being told, to judge a wicked person (and to put him out of the fellowship) because what he had done, was indisputably outrageous. It was blatant, he was unrepentant, and there were no 'grey areas' with that issue...

And so the **church** (not an individual) the church, were to judge the man, and put him out of the fellowship, in the hope that he would repent.

And Paul carries on a similar theme here. As a church, there should be enough corporate, Holy Spirit inspired wisdom, to settle disputes between its members... **(Within the church!)** So, while individuals couldn't settle their own disagreements, surely the church could appoint some wise people to arbitrate.

And so he's saying, "[Do you] **dare** [to take your disputes to the civil courts, to be heard by] **the unrighteous instead of the saints?**

Wouldn't it make more sense, for the settling of disputes between Christians, to be done **in** the church, and **by** the church.

Why do you think that is??? Is it because we don't want to air our dirty laundry, for the whole world to see??? ... I don't think that's the issue.

It's because Christian values, are very different to the values of the world... The civil courts, can hand down a worldly judgment, but what is that to do with us?

Apparently as Christians, when Jesus returns, we're going to be judging the world. We're going to be judging the angels... Surely a dispute between 2 Christians shouldn't be too difficult to be settled, by a few wise people within the fellowship...

But even this, is a secondary issue. We haven't yet dug down, to the root of the problem that was plaguing the church.

From this letter to the church in Corinth itself, we already know that there were some in that church, who saw themselves as being very wise, and “*smarter than the average bear*”... It seems that they thought of themselves as being “spiritually superior”. There were factions within the church, and it's pretty obvious that these factions were making a big deal out of suspect or debatable theological issues...

So, they made a ‘big deal’ out of ‘debatable issues’, but when it came to the way they behaved, and in the way they related to each other, they were quite willing, to completely neglect some of the most **basic** and **foundational** teachings of Jesus.

6 times in Chapter 6 (3 times in the 11 verses we're studying this morning), Paul says “**Do you not know**”, that's like saying “You should know better than to behave like this”.

*And you know what??? I've seen it, and I bet you have too, when a dispute between 2 people in a church (or between 2 factions in a church) – (and often it's a dispute over some kind of debatable matter) – and they're arguing a point of righteousness, and yet they get so bitter, and they are so divided, and they are so strong for their position,, and in doing so, they completely neglect, some of the most **basic** and **foundational** teachings of Jesus.*

Teachings like:

- Love one another.
- Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.
- **Matt 5:39** If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
- **Matthew 5:40** ... if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.
- If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses

The root of the problem in their church, was they were neglecting some of the most **basic** and **foundational** teachings of Jesus.

Paul said:

⁷ To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. (You've already failed) Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?

You can see what was happening, hey? They were standing up for their own rights; When someone did them wrong, they would retaliate... But that's not the way of Jesus. That's how the unrighteous behave.

And he said:

you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

Do you know what I thought of when I read that?

You know how some businesses put that little fish symbol on their business cards, or in their business logo somewhere? I've heard so many examples, of Christians who have chosen to utilise a certain business because they've seen that fish symbol, and "Hey, they're Christians. We can trust them." And the work performed has been so dodgy or they were dishonest, or unscrupulous in their dealings...

Now, I'm not saying that **all** businesses who have the fish symbol are dodgy... But sometimes, those who claim to be Christian, aren't at all, the honest dealers we expect them to be. And we should make sure that we **are**, honest dealers who will bring honour to the Name of Jesus.

Righto, back to the Corinthians: They're behaving like the **unrighteous**. And Paul said:
do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived...

And he gives us a list (similar to the one we had last week in chapter 5, only a bit expanded). And it's a list of those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

And once again, there's sins there, that are 'the easy targets' (you know those sins that "Oh, I'd never do that, but what about those naughty people who do...") .. But there's also some behaviours listed there, that might cut a little bit closer to home.

- It starts out with the sexually immoral, and as we said last week: God's gift of sex, is only properly expressed, between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Biblically, everything else falls under the heading of "sexual immorality". And the sexually immoral, do not inherit the Kingdom of God.
- Idolaters
- Adulterers
- Practicing homosexualsⁱⁱ
- thieves
- Those who are greedy
- Drunkards

None of these inherit the Kingdom of God. Then there's the:

- Revilers. Do you remember what a reviler is? It's a sin of the tongue.

A reviler, is someone who is well known for uttering bitter complaint. They speak with disdain, and no respect. They say the most horrible things. It's someone who speaks abusively, with scorn or criticism... And a person who is known for reviling, will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

- And nor will a swindler – someone who clutches for what is not rightfully theirs

These are all behaviours, that exclude from the Kingdom of God.

And Paul says: ¹¹ And such were some of you.

God doesn't only save "the good people". God is very good at saving "bad people". And what a testimony it is, to the mercy of God, that in that church in Corinth, God had saved:

- The sexually immoral
- Idolaters
- Adulterers
- Practicing Homosexuals
- Thieves
- Greedy
- The drunks
- Those who used to speak abusively with scorn or criticism
- Swindler...

¹¹ And such **were** some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The Christian church, is not a place where those who started out good, get together, to enjoy each other's innate goodness... The church, is a gathering of people, who started

out bad (rotten to the core), but we've been washed, and made holy, and made righteous, and **justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

We **were** evil – I was evil – **You** were evil, but not anymore.

But don't be deceived: We **were** unrighteous. That was our old self, but we've been born again. Don't go back to being that old, unrighteous person again...

But that's exactly what the Corinthians were doing. They were defrauding each other; They were standing up for their own rights; they were retaliating, and taking each other to court...

You know, a lot of those behaviours, are all about being self-centred.

- Selfishness
- Self-satisfaction
- Self-gratification
- Standing up for **my** rights

That's the world's way – self-centred and retaliatory.

The way of the cross, though, is :

- the way of forgiveness;
- love for the other; and
- giving up your rights – self-sacrifice.

Even if only a few Christians in a church, begin to neglect some of the most **basic** and **foundational** teachings of Christ, it affects the whole character of a church. Relationships break

down in the most appalling manner. And in the extreme – it can degrade to such an extent, that legal action is taken between its members.

But when we live by the Spirit, actually **being** the holy ones that we are saved to be, and holding firm to the most **basic** and **foundational** teachings of Christ, that's when we're much more like disciples of Jesus.

Jesus said:

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

We thank you, that You have saved us,

and sanctified us, and justified us, in Your Name.

Lord, You have saved us from our **un**righteousness, but as we examine ourselves, we have to confess that, At times, we've totally neglected, Some of your most basic and foundational teachings, Of how to relate to each other.

Lord, do Your work in me (as an individual)

And do Your work in us (as a church),

That we would **not** be a people who retaliate,

But that we would be a people who forgive.

That we would never become a people of bitterness,
But that we would be a people characterised by love and
peace.

That we would not be a people who stand up for our own
rights,
But that we would be a people, who are willing to suffer
wrong;
A people who would rather **be** defrauded,

To be a people of self-sacrifice,
Because Your way, becomes our way.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

ⁱ <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/18/1034561315893.html>

ⁱⁱ μαλακοὶ οὔτε ἀρσενοκοῖται

μαλακός^b, οὐ *m*: the passive male partner in homosexual intercourse (Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A., 1996. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains.*)

οὐτε – nor / neither

ἀρσενοκοίτης, ου *m*: a male partner in homosexual intercourse—'homosexual.' (Louw, J.P. & Nida, E.A., 1996. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains.*)